

Chasing Shadows. by theweakestthing

Series: [stonathan week 2017 \[2\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Don't copy to another site, M/M, Suicide Attempt, day 2 monster hunting, stonathanweek2017

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jonathan Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-12-19

Updated: 2017-12-19

Packaged: 2022-04-03 14:53:44

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings, No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,186

Publisher: [archiveofourown.org](#)

Summary:

Steve's heart was hammering, smacking like a chisel against his ribs, he could hear his blood rushing as he ran through the darkened woods. The kids weren't far behind, he could see the shaky beams of their flash lights illuminating the trees up ahead, they were yelling but Steve couldn't make out what they were saying. He couldn't hear much of anything over the frantic beating of his heart.

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He'd seen Jonathan, he was damn certain of it, it didn't matter that the other was supposed to be in New York, it didn't matter that it didn't make sense. Steve had seen a whole lot of things that simply didn't make any sense, he'd taken to believing his eyes over everything else.

He only noticed that he'd come to the quarry once he found Jonathan standing on the edge of it, the same quarry where they'd found Will's fake body, it was a spot that none of them were particularly fond of. The sight made Steve's knees weak, his gate stalled to a shuffle.

It was a sight that took him way back, his insides felt as though he were hurtling through to the past, a past he desperately didn't want to go back to. A week after Jonathan had sent off his college applications, the other had been ghosting Steve through the entire ordeal. At first Steve had figured that Jonathan just needed some space, needed some time after going through all that stress, that the other just needed some time to relax so he left Jonathan alone.

The distance between them was driving Steve up the wall, like a cat he felt as though he needed to rub himself up against someone because he was so touch starved. Steve knew he was somewhat of an attention seeker, he just needed more attention than other people, namely Jonathan who happily could spend a whole month barely communicating with anyone. He'd been good though and kept himself to himself while waiting for Jonathan to come to him as though the other were an easily spooked deer. Jonathan had called him eventually, sobbing and speaking unintelligible into the phone.

Hours later, Steve had successfully talked Jonathan off of the proverbial ledge. He'd made his way over to the Byers' and held the

younger through what was left of the night. Steve didn't sleep much that night, no matter how exhausted he was he knew Jonathan was far more exhausted. He watched Jonathan sleep and thought about what went through the other's mind, the traumatic experiences Jonathan had been through and the ones they'd been through together, the isolation and self-loathing that had twisted Jonathan's self-worth. Steve vowed to work to build Jonathan's self-worth and to love the other to the point of suffocation so that Jonathan was never able to feel so low again.

Out there, shuffling toward the edge of the quarry, Steve felt as though he'd failed. His gut churned, writhed like a ball of mating snakes, at the thought of such an outright failure. He felt as though he was going to be sick.

"Jonny," Steve called softly, Jonathan didn't move though and as Steve grew closer he could see how the toes of Jonathan's shoes curled slightly over the edge of the quarry.

"Steve, that's not Jonathan," Dustin's voice rang out and echoed around the vast clearing, the noise cut straight through Steve's thoughts.

The small group of teens broke through into the clearing, sneakers against the gravel and dirt on the ground, the skittering of small stones and dirt rankled around in Steve's mind. He didn't really understand what the hell they were saying. Steve didn't dare turn from Jonathan before him, he'd never turn from Jonathan especially in these situations.

"Jonathan's not here, there's no one there," Will screamed, he was the last to break through into the clearing.

"But I can..." Steve didn't really know what he was trying to say, there was something, he couldn't wrap his head around what the kids were saying and what he could see before him.

"Someone's messing with your mind," Will yelled breathlessly, "there's no one there," he added as he grew closer to Steve.

"What are you saying?" Steve said, Jonathan didn't turn to him and

Steve didn't reach out, too scared of what might happen.

"There's no one there, we can't see anything, there's just you Steve," Lucas said, exasperation evident in his voice as it rang out semi-strangled, hands thrown up in frustration.

"Ele, you've got to do it now," Mike spoke sharply into the walkie-talkie, the thing didn't look so weirdly large compared to his body anymore, all the kids had had wild growth spurts. All despite Will who was taller but still nowhere near the other kids.

"Steve, get away from the edge," Will said, voice the softest it had been throughout the entire exchange, as though he were treating Steve delicately. "There's no one there, Jonathan's in New York, he's at college, remember we saw him off two months ago," Will continued in that gentle tone.

"I know, but we've been through a whole lot of wide shit that I still don't understand, this wouldn't be the weirdest thing that ever happened," Steve said, it was true, it wasn't the worst thing they'd been through and seeing things that may or may not be there was pretty low on the list of things that still kept him up at night.

"So, how do you know that someone isn't messing with your head?" Dustin asked, tone condescending as he tilted his head.

He turned from the edge, turned from Jonathan and stared at the small group of kids who were now surrounding him in a kind of semi-circle. Dustin was looking at him as though he were stupid and needed to be caught up which wasn't all that different from usual, Max was staring at him with a hard gaze as though she were a second or two from tackling him, Lucas looked just about as frustrated as usual, Mike looked a little fearful and Will looked damned near terrified.

"There's nothing there Steve," Will murmured, inching close, now only a couple of feet away from where Steve stood.

"It's done," Eleven's voice crackled over the speaker of the walkie-talkie still in Mike's hand.

"Look for yourself," Mike yelled, he nodded in the direction of the quarry.

Steve turned back to where Jonathan had been to find no one, if Jonathan had jumped they all would have heard something, a deafening splash that would have felt like concrete against anyone's body.

"There's no one there," Steve heard himself say in a far off kind of way, it was like an out of body experience, he could almost hear a ringing in his ears.

"There never was," Will murmured, his slim fingers gasped at the fabric of Steve's sleeve and pulled the elder back from the edge of the quarry.

Steve went without complaint, the kids practically dragged him back to the Byers' house, Will called Jonathan and the two of them huddled around the receiver as they spoke.